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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between years of teaching experience and teacher specialty area in terms of formulation of vocational objectives in transition planning. Descriptive and inferential data were gathered from 43 secondary special education teachers concerning 393 student transition plans. Results indicated that teaching experience has a significant inverse relationship to outside agency inclusion in transition planning. The adult service providers most actively involved in transition planning were vocational rehabilitation programs and job training and placement assistance programs. Teachers more actively involved in vocational activities did not formulate more vocational objectives than other teachers. Discussion of findings, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research are provided. (Contains 16 references.) (PB)

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Running Head: TEACHER AREA/TENURE IN PLANNING

# Special Education Teaching Area and Years Tenure: Effects on Interagency Collaboration in Transition Planning

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Abstract

The present study sought to gather information on the relationship between years of teaching experience and teacher area in terms of formulation of vocational objectives in transition planning. Senior teachers were expected to utilize more outside agencies than newer teachers. Additionally, teachers working in more vocationally-related specialty areas (e.g., related vocational instruction, "career services," etc.) would include a greater number of vocational goals in student plans. Descriptive and inferential statistics for information gathered from forty-three secondary level special education teachers for 393 student transition plans for the 1992-1993 school year were performed. Results indicated that teaching experience has a significant, but inverse relationship to outside agency inclusion in planning. Additionally, teachers more actively involved in vocational activities did not formulate greater numbers of vocational objectives than other teachers. Discussion of findings, implications for practice and suggestions for future research are provided.

Special Education Teaching Area and Years Tenure: Effects on Interagency Collaboration in Transition Planning

A critical point in the lives of young people is the transition from public school to the world of post-secondary education, employment and life as an adult (Ward, Murray and Kupper, 1991). As a result of legislative mandates (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990; Carl Perkins Vocational Act of 1984), professionals have developed a variety of program options designed to integrate people with disabilities into the workforce (Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell & Asselin, 1990). The extent to which cooperative planning occurs between school staff (predominately teachers) and adult service providers is generally seen as key. This collaboration largely determines the extent to which youth with disabilities achieve goals in employment as well as community living and social/leisure opportunities (Johnson, Bruinicks & Thurlow, 1987; Kortering and Edgar, 1988; Langone, Crisler, Langone & Yohe, 1992; Miller, 1990; Rojewski, 1992).

Researchers, such as Benz & Halpern (1993) and Everson (1993) maintain that minimal investigation has been conducted in establishing characteristics of successful transition programs. Gajar, Goodman & McAfee (1993) articulate this need by stating, "The ultimate question is what works, and for whom?" (p. 416). Numerous studies have tackled this problem from a variety of standpoints. One such concern relates to the influence of teacher demographics on successful transition programs.

Therefore, this manuscript explores how years of teaching experience may work in this process. The purpose of this paper is to help identify whether experience or teaching area constitute influential elements in how collaboration is conducted. It especially focuses on how teachers with differing levels of experience and/or preparation area (e.g.,learning disabled, interrelated, related vocational instruction, etc.) utilize adult provider agencies and the extent to which they incorporate vocational objectives into student transition plans. Little attention has been paid to how these characteristics may influence planning. Identification of potentially influential variables is important since transition policy requires systems and individual teachers to change traditional methods of operation, including personnel roles and responsibilities (Taymans & DeFur, 1994). Determination of what effects one's responses can enhance effectiveness and resolving issues impacting program success (Gajar, Goodman and McAfee, 1993).

Two questions comprised the focus of this study. These were:

* Do seasoned teachers utilize outside agencies at a higher rate than less experienced teachers?
* Do vocational instructors have higher numbers of vocationally-related objectives than other teacher groups?

## Method

### Subjects

Participants in this study were 43 secondary level special education (SPED) teachers teaching at one of seven metropolitan school systems in the state of Georgia. Names of these forty-six teachers were randomly selected (by using a random numbers table) from lists provided by school systems who agreed to allow data collection for this study. The forty-three who consented to participate constituted 93% of the original sample. In total, they provided information for 393 student transition documents. These were either transition goals embedded in Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) or stand-alone Individualized Transition Plans (ITP's). Plans that were eligible for inclusion in the study were those for special education (SPED) students aged 14-21 and enrolled in the ninth through twelfth grades during the 1992-1993 school year. Students must have evidenced a documented primary SPED diagnosis of mild intellectual disability, emotional/behavioral disorder, learning disability or "other" SPED for inclusion. "Other" SPED excluded autism, severe/moderate/profound intellectual disability or severe multiple disabling conditions given that there was a greater likelihood that vocational options (i.e., testing, goals related to competitive employment) would not be incorporated into planning.

### Procedure

A researcher-designed survey instrument was designed and

Teacher Area

piloted as the major tool for data collection. Face validity was established by a panel of seven experts, five of whom held Ph.D's. and two of whom were experienced master's level personnel in the fields of special education (3), rehabilitation counseling (3), and social science research methodology (1). The panel individually critiqued the survey and offered suggestions on question wording, survey format, etc. which were incorporated into the final version. A five hour training session with a research assistant in the use of the survey and interviewing techniques was then conducted. This session included instruction in the use of the survey and coding of 32 simulated transition plans. After subjective evaluation by the primary researcher that the assistant was well-versed in use of the survey, a 2-hour pilot session was conducted. One special education teacher was interviewed and 16 actual transition plans were reviewed at a local high school not participating in the actual study. Interrater reliability between the researcher and research assistant subsequent to the pilot session was quite high ($\underline{r}$=.91). This coefficient was calculated using the Hall and Houten (1983) formula (as referenced in Walker & Shea, 1987).

In terms of subject pool, ten metropolitan school systems in Georgia were asked for permission to conduct the study in their school districts. Of these ten, seven agreed. Schools were then randomly selected from each system and asked for a list of their special education teachers and their current teaching area.

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Teachers who taught students having the included diagnoses were added to a master list from which the original sample of 46 was selected using a random numbers table. The forty-three teachers who agreed to participate were then asked to randomly select four to twelve transition plans to be used in responding to the survey questions. One of the researchers then traveled to the teacher's school for what was typically a 60-80 minute interview. During the interview, the researcher recorded written responses to survey questions based on information contained in the selected transition plans. This information was verbally presented by the teacher. (The researchers were not allowed to personally review plans in order to maintain confidentiality of student records). Of the 393 plans reviewed, 392 were included in the statistical analyses; data from one was excluded due to a miscode regarding the student's diagnostic category.

Results

A number of statistics (both descriptive and inferential) were used to analyze the data. Analyses were conducted using SPSS PC+ and SPSS 4.1 mainframe version.

With respect to the first research question concerning the relationship between years of teaching experience and outside agency utilization, a Pearson-product moment correlation was calculated between years taught (YT), number of agencies used in plans reviewed (AIP) and number of agencies ever used (AEU).

As illustrated in Table 1, while the correlation between

years teaching and number of agencies ever used was insignificant, a weak (r=.19) yet statistically significant correlation existed between number of years teaching and number of agencies used in planning. This finding suggests relative independence (lack of multicollinearity) between these variables but simultaneously that these variables lack a strong linear relationship to one another.

Table 1

Relationship of Teaching Experience to Agency Utilization

| Yrs Teaching (YT) | # Agencies Used in Plans (AIP) | # Agencies Ever Used (AEU) |
|---|---|---|
| YT 1.0000 | .1886** | -.0353 |
| AEU .1886** | 1.0000 | .0986 |
| AIP -.0353 | .0986 | 1.0000 |

**p < .01

In conjunction with the first research question, frequencies and percentages for utilization rates for various adult service agencies was gathered. Respondents (teachers) were asked two questions; first, if any of a number of agencies (including an open "other" category in addition to the providers listed) had ever been used in transition planning. Additionally, they were asked to indicate specifically which ones were included for any given plan being reviewed. The results of this question are shown on the following page in Table 2.

Table 2

Utilization of Referral Agencies in Sampled Transition Plans

| Agency Name | f | % time cited |
|---|---|---|
| Vocational Rehabilitation | 180/392 | 45 |
| JTPA programs | 132/392 | 33 |
| Vo-Tech institutions | 111/392 | 28 |
| MH/MR/SA state agency | 64/392 | 16 |
| Job Corps | 34/392 | 8 |
| Dept. of Family & Children Serv. | 24/392 | 6 |
| Other miscellaneous providers | 16/392 | 4 |
| Health Department | 10/392 | 2 |
| Housing Authority | 5/392 | 1 |
| Employment Service | 2/392 | < 1 |

Note: Percentages may not approximate 100% due to rounding.

As documented above, the most frequently used organizations were the state Division of Rehabilitation Services (involved in transition plans 45% of the time) and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs, who were cited as a participating agency approximately 33% of the time). The two least frequently appearing agencies were the Employment Service (also known as the Department of Labor) and local (public) housing authorities, both of which were enumerated 1% and < 1% of the time, respectively. Miscellaneous other agencies appeared approximately 4% of the time. Frequently reported entities included: the military; Social Security Administration (SSDI/SSI); Legal Aid/Georgia Legal Services; the Department of Corrections and/or Juvenile Court; private institutions, such as the Georgia Sensory Center; residential psychiatric or substance abuse treatment centers; and community groups such as the Association for Retarded Citizens.

Teacher Area

To address the second research question pertaining to teacher area, the sample was broken down into six primary teacher specializations:

* mild intellectual disabilities
* emotionally/behaviorally disturbed
* learning disabled
* interrelated/generic
* related vocational instructors
* "other" (including teachers for the visually impaired, hearing or speech impaired, etc.)

A multivariate analysis of variance was employed to determine significant sources of variation in number of vocational objectives incorporated in planning as influenced by several dependent variables. This included whether the primary agency (vocational rehabilitation) was included in planning, student diagnostic category and teacher area. Results pertaining to teacher area are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance For Vocational Objectives by Teacher Area

| Vocational Objective Category | df | F |
|---|---|---|
| Vocational Evaluation | 1,376 | 2.668 |
| Job Placement | 1,376 | 16.191*** |
| Post-Secondary Training | 1,376 | 2.361 |

*** p <.001

The results shown above indicate that while teacher instructional area was not a significant factor in relation to

the number of objectives generated for transition plans for two of the three examined areas, it was an important factor in the number of job placement objectives seen. Thus, teachers with certain backgrounds significantly more often had job placement as a component in their transition plans than teachers with other backgrounds. This will be elaborated in more detail in the Discussion section.

Table 4 below summarizes the frequency with which job placement objectives were included in planning for the various teacher areas.

Table 4

Distribution of Job Placement Objectives by Teacher Area

| # Times Est. in Plan | Teacher Area | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MIID | E/BD | LD | Inter. | RVI | Other |
| | f | f | f | f | f | f |
| 0 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 53 | 24 |
| 1 | 9 | 12 | 10 | 40 | 37 | 16 |
| 2 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 44 | 12 | 4 |
| 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 19 | 7 | 5 |
| 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

As denoted in Table 4, the teacher group with the highest number of multiple (2 or more) job placement objectives per plan was that of interrelated teachers. The next highest group was that of related vocational instructors, who trailed considerably behind with only 19 plans (versus 65 for interrelated) reflecting 2 or more job placement objectives. The fewest job placement objectives were found for teachers of students with mild

intellectual disabilities and "other" SPED, both of whom each had 9 plans with multiple job placement objectives each. This finding indicated that as a group, interrelated teachers may be incorporating job placement as a transition outcome more often than other teachers who are assisting in establishing transition objectives.

Discussion

It was totally unexpected in both cases that not only would the initial research questions not be supported, but indeed be contrary to what would have appeared as logical outcomes. This was particularly true with respect to the finding of a weak negative correlation between years of teaching and number of agencies used in planning for the subjects reviewed. It was anticipated that the longer a teacher has been in service, the more opportunity he or she has probably had for interagency collaboration and referral. This presumably would be reflected as a higher overall agency use rate as compared to teachers with less field experience. While this finding is surprising, there are several reasonable explanations. Given that the "push" for transition services has become heightened only in recent years, teachers who have been in service for some time may be more "set in their ways" and slower to respond to the call for greater interagency cooperation than newer teachers. Seasoned teachers may also utilize a smaller pool of agencies/outside transition personnel because over the years, they have learned which

agencies get results and are responsive to their students' needs, thus resulting in a more select group of providers whose assistance is enlisted on a more exclusive basis. Finally, one other possibility may be that due to their experience, that veteran special educators find themselves able to provide more services to their students without outside assistance which less experienced teachers may feel more comfortable conducting through referrals to other providers.

The second finding, which dealt with the effect of teacher area on the number of vocational objectives in student transition plans was equally perplexing, in that interrelated teachers clearly appeared to be utilizing job placement more often in transition plans than teachers with stronger vocational functions/focus. One possibility may be that interrelated teacher generally serve individuals with the mildest disabilities, who presumably might have more placement options than other groups. Another explanation may be that RVI teachers often work as a team with other special education teachers on transition plans and may, in this capacity, only be responsible for a portion as opposed to all of the planning goals. Yet another hypothesis is that RVI teachers may be asked, due to their greater vocational expertise, to work with more severely disabled students, thus possibly skewing their efforts in the direction of independent living goals rather than those more closely associated with competitive employment outcomes.

A number of restrictions on the validity and/or applicability of this investigation must also be considered in interpreting the results. The sample was obtained from a relatively restricted geographical area and focused on metropolitan school systems only; issues and findings might be quite different in rural settings. There were also unequal numbers of teachers and plans for each area of disability; while procedures (such as calculating harmonic 'n') were undertaken, this situation may still have resulted in skewed results, a likely possibility given that the variances were tested and found to be lacking in homogeneity. The most relevant factor, however, lies in the discovery that many teachers did not entirely formalize their transition plans. Many times, in absence of written goals, teachers were still able to offer information on vocational activities established for the student. Since the researchers were only able to record this information in anecdotal fashion, then it stands to reason that the "official" statistics may well be incorrect. While they might be difficult to structure methodologically, future studies with a strong qualitative component could potentially yield valuable information on the planning process.

It was not surprising, though, to find that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and JTPA programs were the most actively involved adult service providers in transition planning. VR is considered the lead agency in providing services to adults with

disabilities in the U.S., and both agencies are able to work with youth age 16 and above who are still enrolled in school (in fact, age 14 for JTPA Summer Youth Programs). This commitment and availability to youth would certainly serve to make these programs ones often called upon to assist with transition efforts, in addition to the fact that both these programs are very comprehensive in terms of assistance offered. Examination of these program characteristics and others which might play a role might be undertaken by representatives of other service providers who might wish to work more with student populations. This finding is one which should also be considered by states when allocating their block grant funds for job training programs, given that the Job Training Partnership Act will no longer be funded at the federal level after June 1996.

Evidence is that too many special education students leave school and experience problems related to their employability (Brolin, 1991; White, 1992; Wehman, 1990; Siegel and Gaylord-Ross, 1991). In response to this problem, emphasis has been placed on the concept of transitioning within the scope of law, literature and applied practice. Support exists in the literature for the notion that without interagency cooperation, students with disabilities frequently face, upon leaving school, abrupt cessation of services formerly received through the school. These include lack of career guidance, job-retention support, job placement, and occupational skills training among

others. These students are often essentially powerless to recapitulate the former coordination previously orchestrated between education and community services. Belief in the importance of cooperative planning and factors contributing to that end were a major impetus for this study.

There are several implications of this study for practitioners, transition policy makers and researchers. Clearly, given the exploratory nature of this data and more explicitly, the lack of conclusiveness for these results, would suggest a definite need for follow-up to determine the mechanisms responsible for these findings. In the interim, those responsible for policy might do well to conduct more informal review at the local level in the form of discussion with teachers in order to better formulate strategies to improve transition planning and interagency collaboration. This is especially true since interagency collaboration is becoming more and more an established "best practice" in transition and because student placement on a job prior to graduation has been presented in the literature as one of the best indicators of subsequent employment. Practitioners (i.e., teachers and cooperating personnel such as vocational rehabilitation counselors with transition caseloads) could incorporate these results by examining their own practices and those of their peers, and perhaps borrowing ideas (for teachers) or, for agency personnel, conducting a needs assessment in order to better target efforts

to staff and students less likely to receive services.

Efforts such as the present one should ideally be followed up by longitudinal research to determine whether more comprehensiveness in the form of more vocational objectives is related to successful placement post-school in either an employment or continuing education setting. Exploratory studies such as this one, in order to hold promise for improvements in service delivery, must be tied in with outcomes in order to contribute to betterment of today's practices.

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